
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1733 16th Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Scottish Rite Temple		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	November 29, 2018	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	18-668		Alteration
		X	New Construction
			Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Perseus-TDC, in partnership with the Supreme Council 33rd degree Scottish Rite, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a four-story plus penthouse apartment building at the rear of the temple on 15th and S Streets NW. The new building would incorporate a two-story stable building located along the alley that runs on the south side of the property. Plans have been prepared by Hickok Cole Architects.

Property History and Description

The Scottish Rite Temple was designed by John Russell Pope and Elliott Woods in 1910, with construction completed in 1915. The monumental classical design is based on the Hellenistic temple-tomb of King Mausolos at Halicarnassos, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The building is among the grandest expressions of the formal classicism that typified the City Beautiful movement in Washington in the early 20th century.

Clad in granite on the first floor and limestone above, the building features a full-width entrance terrace facing 16th Street flanked by matching sphinxes. A continuous monumental colonnade with 33 fluted Ionic columns support a stepped pyramidal roof that expresses the temple room within; the rear elevation features a semi-circular apse. The building is a landmark listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register and is a contributing structure to the 16th Street Historic District.

The rear of the temple's lot is located in the 14th Street Historic District and contains a two-story brick building that was constructed as a stable and later converted to a garage; it was built in several phases from the late 1880s through the early 20th century. The outbuilding was historically unrelated to the temple and is now used for equipment storage. The remainder of the property was occupied by late 19th century rowhouses that were acquired and demolished by the Masons prior to the site being protected as part of the historic district, resulting in a rear garden and parking lots.

The site consists of a single lot – lot 108, in Square 192 – that is split-zoned. The portion of the lot occupied by the temple on 16th Street is zoned RA (Residential Apartment)-9, which allows for medium-to-high density apartments (up to 90 feet in height, 3.5 FAR, 75% lot occupancy). The portion of the lot behind is zoned RA-8, which allows for moderate-density apartment buildings (up to 50 feet in height, 1.8 FAR, 60% lot occupancy).

The surrounding neighborhood to the south, east and north is comprised of two- and three-story rowhouses dating from the 1870s through 1900, churches, a former school and convent (the Bishop's Gate condominium across 15th Street), and mid-rise three-, four-, and five-story apartment buildings dating from between 1900-1917. The 14th Street Historic District is located to the south and east; to the north of S Street is the U Street Historic District.

The Board approved a concept proposal for renovations to the temple in 2013; most of the work was restorative or related to the replacement of outmoded mechanical systems but also included creation of an accessible public entrance on S Street by converting an existing window into a door, and an improved delivery entrance on the alley. The alley building was to be converted to storage of mechanical equipment. The work has not been undertaken and it has been represented at recent community meetings that the development partnership with Perseus was forged to help offset the anticipated cost of the renovation.

Proposal

The plans call for construction of a “C”-shaped apartment building with its primary entrance at the southeast corner on 15th Street. The building would rise four stories (to 50 feet) with a penthouse (rising 12 feet, with a portion rising to 15 feet) set above a partially-raised English basement, a fully below-grade sub-basement below the English basement, and two levels of underground parking below the sub-basement. Except at the building entrance, there would be a continuous 15’ deep below-grade areaway projecting 5’ from the face of the building to provide light and egress for the basement levels.

The building has been designed with brick corner elements with glassy projecting bays and oriels. The body of the building between the corners would be articulated to evoke groupings of brick rowhouses with variations in their bay projections, brick work and detailing. These rowhouse-like elements would have individual entrances to the English basement units on 15th Street and to the raised first floor units on S Street. The penthouse would be clad in diamond-shaped metal panels in a gray slate color, articulated with windows and doors.

The alley building would be converted to residential use. Bricked-in windows would be opened up and windows installed in existing and new openings.

The building, including its areaways, projections and stairs, would be set just behind the building restriction and property lines. The public space front yards (17’9” deep on 15th Street, 16’2” on S) would be landscaped, with lead walks to the individual ground-level entries and a metal perimeter fence. A landscaped courtyard would be created on the inner portion of the site with access through the building and from a mid-block entrance between the rear of the temple and the west side of the new building.

The project will also require a subdivision to create a new lot for the apartment building. The boundary will follow the original rear line of the temple lot, which also coincides with the change in zoning between the two portions of the property.

Evaluation

Development of Site

The current iteration of the project was developed with design input from the Historic Preservation Office through the course of several meetings in the summer of 2018. As a starting point, the discussions were based on the presumption that the site could be developed. While the rear portion of the lot currently serves as a private garden and parking area for the temple, it is not a public park, was historically unrelated to the temple, and was occupied by 19th century rowhouses until the late 20th century. The garden, having been created in the past 25 years, is not part of the temple landmark and not recognized as contributing to the historic districts in which it is located. Neither the Near Northwest Area Element of the Comprehensive Plan (which covers the subject site) nor the Future Land Use Map call for the site to be retained as green space.

Further, it was presumed that a well-designed project consistent with the RA-8 (Dupont Circle Moderate Density Residential Apartment) zoning could be compatible with the character of the surrounding

historic districts. The allowable height, density, lot occupancy and building types permitted in the RA-8 zone are not inconsistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The Near Northwest Element of the Comprehensive Plan offers development guidance that is consistent with and supportive of the purposes of the historic preservation act: 1) requiring that the scale of development should be consistent with the nature and character of the Dupont Circle area in height and bulk; 2) ensuring that there be a general compatibility in the scale of new buildings with older low-scale buildings by restricting the maximum permitted height and floor area ratio (FAR) of new buildings to the underlying zone; 3) precluding demolition that would lead to an increase in height and FAR in appropriate for the area; and 4) enhancing the residential character of the area by maintaining existing residential uses and controlling the scale, location, and density of commercial and residential development (Policy NNW-2.2.2).

Alley Building

A third presumption was that the existing carriage house/garage, while architecturally modest and somewhat altered by its changing uses, retains sufficient character to be worthy of retention and reuse. The building's evolution and history as a blacksmith shop, a commercial livery stable and later a public garage is illustrative of the many alley-based services that supported the late-19th and early-20th century city. The building was constructed within the period of significance for the 16th Street Historic District and was treated as a contributing building in the 2013 concept plan for the temple renovation. In 2014, the building was identified as meeting the eligibility criteria for a contributing building established by DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey.

Design Concept

The architectural approach to the project was arrived at after first considering whether the design should try to relate specifically to the character of the temple. However, several shortcomings became evident when this was studied. Once a new building is massed on the site, the back of the temple will no longer be visible from most public vantage points, rendering the visual relationship between the new building and the temple remote. As well, the symmetry, materiality, classical styling, monumental scale and civic-institutional characteristics of the temple are so completely different from the asymmetrical, small-scale, organic development pattern of the neighborhood that attempts to apply the temple's characteristics to a mid-rise apartment building felt contrived and out of place with the surrounding context.

Instead, the new building has been designed to relate to the residential context of the historic districts which will surround it on its three primary sides. The recently-completed Hine Junior High School redevelopment on 8th Street SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District was identified as a good example of a contextual approach to infill for an historic context. As shown below, the use of design characteristics associated with late-19th and early 20th century rowhouse neighborhoods – a cadence of projecting bays, architectural variety, and a material palette common to the district – can be successful when applied to a four-story apartment building in scaling it appropriately to an historic neighborhood.

Like the Hine project, the proposed building's mass and elevations have been broken down into smaller-scaled building components with projecting bays to relate it to the buildings on surrounding streets. While the specific materials proposed might warrant further consideration (they appear a bit dark and grim in the renderings), the intent of using warm, earth-toned masonry materials is consistent with the primary materials and colors in the neighborhood, and the use of brick detailing would relate to the brick corbelling and pattern work common in the community. The penthouse has been designed to reference the color and texture of the neighborhood's traditional roof features, with patterned slate-color tile and projecting dormer windows, albeit in a manner that is clearly contemporary.



New construction, 8th Street SE, Capitol Hill Historic District

Suggested Revisions

Refinements to the height, proportion of window to wall, the character of the fenestration, and the design of the corner elements would improve the compatibility of the concept. While the neighborhood is comprised primarily of two- and three-story rowhouses above raised basements, four- and five-story buildings are not uncommon or incompatible. Four-story apartment buildings within sight of the subject property include 1625 and 1822 15th Street and the Wardman row of apartment buildings in the 1400 block of R Street. The 1400 block of T Street has apartment buildings of four or more stories, and the landmark Gladstone and Hawarden Apartments at 1419 and 1423 R Street rise to five stories. However, the floor-to-floor heights of historic buildings in the neighborhood are commonly lower than the proposed floor-to-floor heights of 11 feet for the first three floors and 12 feet for the fourth and penthouse levels (the heights are indicated in the elevation and section drawings; they are incorrectly identified as 10' on pages A-81 and A-82). The result is the building being a taller and bigger four-story building than is typical for the neighborhood. Reducing the height of the building by 5-6 feet would improve the proportions of the buildings relative to its surroundings.



Proposed 15th Street elevation

Similarly, in comparing the elevations of the building with its surroundings, the proportional size of the windows is substantially larger than is typical for a context of historic rowhouses and mid-rise apartment buildings. While the Board has often found greater proportions of glass compatible in commercial areas (such as on 14th Street, where there the context includes highly-glazed auto showrooms and buildings with storefront windows) a closer proportional relationship to the context has typically been required in residential areas. As the proportional size of the windows is reduced, it is also recommended that some greater variety to the window types and sizes be considered to more closely relate to character of the project's residential context.

The corner elements are less successful than the project's rowhouse vocabulary in relating to the scale, bay proportions, and overall character of the surrounding historic districts. Reducing the extent of glazing in all of the projections and reducing the width of the bay projections facing 15th Street and the rear of the temple (to be more akin to the thinner oriel projections on S Street) is recommended. The projection of the end element on S Street closest to the temple should also be reconsidered. Aligning this with the rowhouse elements (rather than projecting forward) and pulling the penthouse further back from the western edge of the building would open up public views to the temple. Redesigning this end of the building as a continuation of the rowhouse vocabulary should also be evaluated.



Proposed S Street elevation with projecting end element

The depth of proposed perimeter areaway around the building is unusual. However, it is arguable whether this presents a design compatibility issue for the historic district. With the depth of the public space front yards and an appropriate landscape plan, the areaway will likely not be perceptible from public street view. The proposal is not inconsistent with the Board's "Preservation and Design Guideline for Basement Entrances and Windows", which is intended to ensure that existing topography is retained and that areaways are kept to a minimum size so as to not visually dominate the site. While the guideline discourages guardrails around areaways, landscaping is encouraged to screen or lessen the visibility of

both the areaway in instances where a railing is required by the construction code. However, the plan should be revised to relocate the stairs coming up from the areaway so that they are not visible from the public sidewalk. Relocating the stairs to the interior courtyard would take them out of public street view.

Subdivision

The proposed subdivision would reestablish the historic boundaries of the landmark lot and is consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board find the general concept for new construction and subdivision compatible with the landmark, the 16th Street and the 14th Street historic districts, but that the following work be undertaken to improve the proposal's compatibility:

- 1) The floor-to-floor heights should be reduced to 10 feet on the above-grade floors to lower the building's height and bring its proportions closer to those found in the historic district;
- 2) The proportional size of the windows should be reduced and the design of the windows restudied to have greater variety to be more in character with the surrounding residential neighborhood;
- 3) The extent of glazing and width of the projections in the corner pavilions should be reduced;
- 4) The pavilion on S Street and its penthouse should be pulled back to open up views to and provide a more deferential relationship to the temple. Redesigning this element as a continuation of the rowhouse vocabulary should be considered;
- 5) The stair to the basement areaway should be relocated to the courtyard so that it is not visible from public street view;
- 6) The cladding materials should be selected to ensure that they are commensurate with the neighborhood and not too dark, and final selection should be made by erecting on-site mock ups;
- 7) The landscape plan should be developed with evergreen plantings to screen the basement areaway and guardrail, and to provide the impression from street view that the building sits on a base surrounded by foundation plantings.

It is further recommended that final approval of the subdivision be delegated to staff, and that the concept design be resubmitted for HPRB review when ready.

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